Meeting of the States Parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction

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Practical challenges facing the implementation of Article VII, and possible solutions

Recent International Developments Relevant to Article VII

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Summary

Since the last intersessional process, a variety of international organizations and other entities have taken steps that contribute to capacity development at the national level, to capacity assessment and needs identification, to effective international response to disease outbreaks, and specifically to response to deliberate events. In order to effectively strengthen assistance under Article VII, promote preparedness, and ensure swift and coordinated response, BWC States Parties should recognize the potential contribution made by these efforts, and take them into account in developing potential solutions to the issues mandated to this Meeting of Experts.

1. At the 2017 Meeting of States Parties, delegates to the Biological and Toxins Weapons Convention (BWC) agreed to a series of meetings over the next few years focused on Article VII and on the related issues of increasing preparedness and national response capability. Topics to be covered include practical challenges to implementation of Article VII, guidelines for requesting assistance, procedures for providing assistance when requested, how mobile biomedical units might contribute to response, how States Parties might strengthen response capabilities, and how to prepare for and respond to deliberate use of biological agents against agriculture, livestock or the environment. This current focus builds on the work of the 2014 and 2015 intersessional meetings on opportunities to strengthen implementation of Article VII.

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2. The global community came together in 2014 to respond to the West Africa Ebola outbreak -- a response that highlighted the challenges in mounting an international response to a disease event, and presented a series of lessons that local, national, international, and inter-governmental actors have been working hard to address. Subsequently, there has been a series of public health events requiring coordinated global assistance, including the ongoing threat of Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) in the Middle East and the spread of the coronavirus to South Korea in 2015; the emergence of Zika virus in the Americas and associated congenital abnormalities; the outbreak of plague in Madagascar, focused in urban areas; and the public health challenges associated with chemical weapons use in Syria. Polio is still declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern by the World Health Organization (WHO), and as of this writing, the latest outbreak of Ebola in the Democratic Republic of the Congo remains active. These ongoing public health challenges highlight the importance of capacity building efforts to strengthen national level capabilities to prevent, detect and respond to infectious disease threats. These capacities are paramount for preparedness for a deliberate biological event.

3. While nations work to strengthen their public health infrastructure to respond to naturally occurring disease events, it is clear that entities at all levels are far from ready to address the myriad of challenges associated with a deliberate biological release. Over the past two years, however, there have been a number of activities aimed to improve global health security, in general, and response to deliberate biological events, in particular. Below is a select set of such activities. BWC States Parties should seek to draw upon, rather than duplicating, these efforts as they seek to fulfill the goals of Article VII.

Building National Capacities for Detection and Response:

GHSA 2024: In October 2017, the Global Health Security Agenda (GHSA) Ministerial Meeting was held in Kampala, Uganda, where more than 40 GHSA member countries supported extension of the GHSA until 2024. The next phase of GHSA will build on the first five years to identify and achieve health security goals, including through increased meaningful engagement with all relevant partners, accountability, multisectoral approaches, and sustainable financing to strengthen capacity to prevent, detect and respond to infectious disease threats, whether natural, deliberate, or accidental. (For more information, see https://www.ghsagenda.org/ghsa2024)

- **FAO Emergency Management Centre for Animal Health:** the Food and Agriculture Organization's Emergency Management Centre for Animal Health adopted a new name and an expanded role under a new Strategic Action Plan in 2017. It has begun an effort to update FAO's "Good Emergency Management Practices" (GEMP) guide, and to develop training materials to assist countries in developing these capacities.

Assessing Capacities and Identifying Needs:

- **Joint External Evaluation (JEE):** The Joint External Evaluation Tool - International Health Regulations (2005) is intended to assess country capacity to prevent, detect, and rapidly respond to public health threats independently of whether they are naturally occurring, deliberate, or accidental. The purpose of the external evaluation process is to measure country specific status and progress in achieving the targets. The external evaluation allows countries to identify their most urgent health security needs; prioritize opportunities for enhanced preparedness, response and action; and engage with current and prospective

donors and partners to target resources effectively. As of May 2018, 75 countries had participated in a JEE, and approximately two dozen had progressed to developing national action plans based on the JEE findings. (For more information, see http://www.who.int/ihr /procedures/mission-reports/en/ and https://extranet.who.int/sph/)

- **Measuring success in health security:** Several organizations have been working to identify the best methods for monitoring improvements in global health security and identifying appropriate metrics. This includes an effort by Harvard University focused on global indicators as well as an NTI/Johns Hopkins University/The Economist Intelligence Unit effort focused on a national level index. In Spring 2018, the World Bank and the WHO launched a new Global Preparedness Monitoring Board (GPMB). The GPMB will identify and prioritize gaps and then work to enhance coordination in strengthening pandemic preparedness. (For more information, see http://www.who.int/news-room/detail/24-05-2018-who-and-world -bank-group-join-forces-to-strengthen-global-health-security)

Strengthening International Response and Assistance:

- **WHO Health Emergencies Programme:** Following the 2014-2016 West Africa Ebola outbreak, WHO Member States requested and approved the new Health Emergencies Programme, adding operational activities to WHO's traditional technical and normative roles in order to enhance preparedness and response activities. This program has strengthened over the past two years, adding staff and building rapid response capacity. Improving outbreak management and performance remains a top priority of the organization. (For more information, see http://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/WHA71/A71_5-en.pdf).

- **Financing emergencies:** The World Bank group launched the Pandemic Emergency Financing Facility (PEF) in 2017, as a fast-disbursing global financing mechanism to respond to emerging pandemics. In addition, the WHO manages the Contingency Fund for Emergencies (CFE), which has already been used to support the response to over four dozen events. (For more information, see http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/pandemics/brief/pandemic-emergency-financing-facility;and http://www.who.int/emergencies/funding/contingency-fund/en/)

- **Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI)**: Effective and available medical countermeasures are a critical element of outbreak response, but do not exist for all diseases with significant epidemic potential. Founded in 2017, CEPI seeks to overcome barriers to the development of vaccines for high-consequence epidemic diseases through a new funding model, with the explicit goal of assuring affordable access to all. Its initial efforts are targeted at the MERS-CoV, Lassa, and Nipah viruses. (More information can be found at cepi.net).

Addressing the Threat of Biological Weapons Use: In 2017-2018, several efforts began specifically addressing preparedness and response to deliberate biological events

- The BWC Implementation Support Unit initiated an Article VII project designed to strengthen policy coordination and resource sharing amongst international

organizations; improve international coordination at the operational level; and develop operational procedures and tools.

- The United Nations Office of Counterterrorism is engaged in a multiple year effort to ensure effective interagency operations and coordination in the case of a chemical or biological attack.
- The World Health Organization is developing internal processes to clarify and strengthen its capacity to respond to a deliberate biological event. The WHO is also working to update the Public Health Response to CBW guidebook, last updated in 2004.
- The UN Office of Disarmament Affairs, with the support of interested UN member states, has been working to identify and address planning, training, logistical, and other needs to ensure the operational readiness of the UN Secretary General's Mechanism for investigating alleged use of biological and chemical weapons for responding to a deliberate biological event.
- The World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) in March 2018 published *Guidelines for Investigation of Suspicious Biological Events* to assist national veterinary services in preparing for and investigating such events (available at http://www.oie.int/fileadmin/Home/eng/Our_scientific_expertise/docs/pdf/Guidelines_Investigation_Suspicious_Biological_Events.pdf)
- Academic groups are conducting research and developing tools to identify best practices for requesting assistance, coordinating global response activities, and mapping global systems for response to deliberate biological events.

4. The United States encourages States Parties at their 2018 annual meeting to welcome these ongoing international, inter-governmental, regional and national efforts to both strengthen capacity to respond to naturally occurring public health emergencies, and explore the particular challenges of response to deliberate biological events. States Parties should seek to draw upon the findings and experiences of these initiatives where relevant, and to approach the challenge of building preparedness and response capabilities and effective, coordinated assistance as a shared effort. It is important for the BWC community to be aware of the work that other entities have already done in identifying the obstacles to preparedness and response to biological threats, and searching for solutions to those difficulties. States Parties can save time and resources by acknowledging these efforts in other fora and studying their conclusions, which will allow them to prioritize their own work and make more rapid progress to identify and close any remaining gaps. States Parties should build upon these initiatives to advance preparedness and response activities in the BWC context and help to ensure that in the event of a deliberate biological attack, we can work together to rapidly and effectively respond.